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WAR MACHINE®

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ABNETT

HAYNES

LABAT

GREENE

CAUGHT IN THE GRIP OF KANG THE CONQUEROR, OUR WORLD TEETERS ON THE BRINK OF DESTRUCTION. A FEW BRAVE MEN AND WOMEN STAND THEIR GROUND AGAINST THE EVIL, FIGHTING FOR THE FUTURE OF MANKIND. ONE OF THEM, JAMES RHODES-- BONDED TO THE ALIEN WARWEAR SYSTEM-- NOW UNDERTAKES A VITAL PART OF THAT BATTLE... ALONE!

WISH UPON A STAR

SUNRISE.

I LEAVE THE SKY BEHIND AND LEAP INTO THE HOLLOW BLACKNESS OF HIGH ORBIT. THE WARWEAR'S IMPELLERS ARE PUSHING ME OUT OF THE GRAVITY WELL AT A TOUCH OVER FIFTEEN KILOMETERS A SECOND.

ESCAPE VELOCITY... WITH A COMFORTABLE MARGIN. I'VE GOT A JOB TO DO, AND TIME'S WASTING.

A "CROSSING" FINALE
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VACUUM **HARDENS** AROUND ME, AND THE WARWEAR STIFFENS, PRESSURIZING INTO A PROTECTIVE SHELL.

THE STRUCTURAL FIBERS GO RIGID, PULLING THE ALIEN POLYMER **FABRIC** TAUT AND **STEEL-HARD**. A DAMPING FIELD SEALS MY MOUTH AND NOSE AND CIRCULATES AIR. THE MASK LENSES TINT AND POLARIZE.

THREE SECONDS FLAT, IT'S MORPHED FROM A WEAPON-SUIT TO **SPACE-ARMOR**. THE CHANGE IS SO FLUID AND **SURE**, I START TO WONDER IF **THIS**-- COLD SPACE-- IS ITS **NATURAL** ENVIRONMENT.

AND FOR A MOMENT, I CAN PICTURE IT... THE WARWEAR LOCKED IN SILENT, AIRLESS BATTLES BEHIND DISTANT SUNS, AND ONLY OCCASIONALLY - **UNNATURALLY** - VENTURING INTO THE LEADEN, NOISY WORLDS OF **PLANETARY** LIFE. IS THAT THE **WORLD** IT KNOWS BEST?

ENOUGH! THERE'S **MY** WORLD. A BALL OF BLUE GLASS FLECKED WITH WHITE. SLOWLY TURNING IN THE DARK.

IT'S GOING TO *DIE* UNLESS I GET TO WORK.

SUNLIGHT GLINTS ON METAL SKIN...

THE **DRONE** I SENT AHEAD TO SCOUT HAS RETURNED. IT BECKONS ME TO FOLLOW...

... THROUGH THE NIGHT AND TO MY GOAL

THE **STARCORE SATELLITE.**

STARK ENTERPRISES WAS AWARDED THE CONTRACT TO BUILD A NEW COMMUNICATIONS AND RESEARCH SATELLITE SCANT MONTHS AGO. A **GOVERNMENT** SATELLITE.

STARK WAS SO **CONFIDENT**, HE'D ALREADY **BUILT** THE GROUND CONTROL FACILITY **BY** THE TIME OF THE ANNOUNCING PRESS JUNKET.*

AT THE TIME, IT SMACKED OF SMOOTH PR FROM A COCKSURE INDUSTRIALIST. ONE WITH AN EYE FOR HEADLINES.

BUT THE SATELLITE IS ALREADY UP HERE... **YEARS** AHEAD OF THE CONTRACTED LAUNCH DATE. TURNING THE STARCORE PROJECT INTO A CONVENIENT **COVER-STORY** FOR AN ORBITAL FACILITY THAT STARK HAD **ALREADY** PUT INTO SPACE.

I FEEL A CHILL IN MY HEART, COLDER THAN THE AIRLESS VOID AROUND ME.

FOR THIS GLEAMING SPINDLE OF STEEL... IS THE **WEAPON** WITH WHICH STARK INTENDS TO **MURDER** THE HUMAN RACE.

* SEE IRON MAN #319. - THE EDITOR

WEAPONS HARDPOINT!

PROXIMITY & MOTION TRACKERS SNAP MY SYSTEM AWAKE AND IT LANCES OUT WITH A NEEDLE-FINE LASER. THERE'S NO SOUND, JUST **DEADLY** LIGHT.

MY DRONE SMOKES IT WITH A SILENT GLARE OF BURNING PLASMA.

STUNG, THE SATELLITE'S DEFENSE SYSTEM KICKS INTO AUTOMATIC. A LATTICE OF LASER FIRE BURSTS FROM THE FLANK HARDPOINTS.

I'M DEAD IF I STAY OUT HERE!

GOTTA SWING IN CLOSE TO THE SUPER-STRUCTURE, JUST ***INSIDE*** THE REACH OF THE LASERS...

... AND HEAD FOR THE AIRLOCK.

I'VE GOT NO KEY, NO ENTRY CODE.

SO I LET THE WARWEAR **LEARN** THEM FROM THE LOCK ITSELF.

ALIEN AND TERRESTRIAL TECHNOLOGIES **CONVERSE** FOR A FEW SECONDS. THE WARWEAR **INTERROGATES** AND DOESN'T TAKE "NO" FOR AN ANSWER.

PART SKELETON KEY, PART **INQUISITOR,** IT STRIPS AWAY THE SECURITY LOCK-OUTS AND JUMP-STARTS THE HATCH ASSEMBLY.

THE IRIS-SHUTTER RELEASES WITH A SILENT PUFF OF AIR.

AND I'M IN.

INTO THE **UNKNOWN.**

INTO THE **DARK.**

GOT AN ATMOSPHERE IN HERE. *UNCIR-CULATING*, BUT FRESH.

THIS SPINAL CORRIDOR'S MY BEST HOPE FOR ACCESS TO THE C-&-C.

BUT I COULD DO WITH MORE DATA. THERE'S A SHEAF OF F/O TRUNKING RUNNING DOWN THE BULKHEAD HERE. ONE OF THE MAIN INFORMATION/CONTROL ARTERIES.

I BREED ANOTHER REMOTE POD AND UNSKIN IT FROM MY SHOULDER-GUARD.

*THIS ONE'S TAILORED AS A DATA-THIEF. IT ANCHORS TO THE WALLS WITH THE CLAW-LIMBS AND SINKS INTERFACIAL PROBES INTO THE TRUNKING LIKE A **PARASITE**.*

*VIA THE WARWEAR'S EMPATHIC LINK, I'M HOOKED INTO THE SATELLITE'S **NERVOUS SYSTEM. NOW** I'VE GOT ALL THE DATA I CAN HANDLE.*

STARK

FORTY METERS ON, THE C-&-C.

I'M DOING A VISUAL SWEEP FOR THE CHRONOGRAPHIC ARRAY WHEN I REALIZE...

... I'M NOT ALONE IN HERE.

WEAPONS DEPLOY! SPEAKER MODE!

NICE AND SLOW! OUT WHERE I CAN SEE YOU!

DON'T SHOOT, JIM...

... I COME IN PEACE.

SKYE?!?

HOW THE BLAZES CAN YOU BE HERE? WE'RE IN OUTER SPACE!

SO WE ARE.

COME ON, JIM... DID YOU REALLY THINK I WAS JUST SOME FLOOZIE YOU MET ON VACATION?*

I'M *GAIN-FULLY EMPLOYED* BY A POWER WHOSE AGENDA YOU'D REGARD AS *COSMIC*. SUPER-VISING YOUR ACTIVITIES IS JUST *PART* OF MY WORK.

LIKE MAKING SURE I GOT LINKED WITH THE WARWEAR SUIT?

*BACK IN WAR MACHINE #18 - THE EDITOR

BACK THERE, IT ALL SEEMED SO *HAP-HAZARD*, BUT NOW THINGS ARE FITTING TOGETHER. THIS HAS SOMETHING TO DO WITH *STARK, DOESN'T* IT? STARK... AND THAT MANIAC *KANG* HE'S SOLD HIS SOUL TO!

YOUR... EMPLOYER WANTED ME SUITED IN THE WARWEAR READY TO FIGHT STARK, DIDN'T HE?

GIVEN YOUR *HISTORY* WITH THE HUMAN STARK, IT SEEMED LIKELY YOU'D BE THE ONE TO LEAD THE *DEFENSE* AGAINST HIS SCHEMES. BUT THEN, YOU *LOST* THE ORIGINAL WAR MACHINE ARMOR. SO A REPLACEMENT WAS SWIFTLY ARRANGED.

A REPLACE-MENT MORE THAN CAPABLE OF TAKING ON *IRON MAN*.

BUT YOU'VE ALREADY HAD THE CHANCE TO DEFEAT STARK. AND HE... SLIPPED AWAY.

THAT WASN'T THE WAY IT WAS MEANT TO BE.

I'M NO HIRED GUN, LADY!

IF YOU EXPECTED ME TO BE STARK'S *EXECUTIONER*, YOU THOUGHT *WRONG!* THE MAN'S MY FRIEND!

NOW WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THIS *BOSS* OF YOURS... AND HOW HE FITS INTO THE BIG PICTURE..?

ALL IN GOOD TIME!

OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN WHY YOU'RE HERE? THIS STATION IS ABOUT TO KILL YOUR PLANET!

STARCORE'S LADEN WITH *CHRONOGRAPHIC* BATTERIES SET TO UNLEASH HUGE AMOUNTS OF TEMPORAL ENERGY UPON THE PLANET. HUMAN CULTURE WILL BE *CRIPPLED* AS THE TIMESTREAM *RESHAPES* AROUND IT, AND THE PLANET WILL BE LEFT *VULNERABLE* FOR KANG'S INVASION.

IT WAS MEANT TO WORK IN SEQUENCE WITH THE DEVICES UNDER *FORCE WORKS HQ*, BUT I HELPED *TRASH* THAT END OF THE OPERATION*.

*IN FORCE WORKS #20, - THE EDITOR

DON'T GUILT-TRIP ME, SKYE, I *HAVEN'T* FORGOTTEN.

AND DON'T THINK THAT'S ANYTHING MORE THAN A *TEMPORARY* EVASION OF MY QUESTION.

WHEN I'M DONE HERE, WE'LL *CONTINUE*.

NOW THIS IS ALL THAT'S LEFT... A ROGUE WEAPON, FOCUSED ON A HELPLESS PLANET. I GOTTA SHUT IT DOWN BEFORE IT CAN--

AN ALARM STARTS INTO MY MIND, CUTTING ME OFF. SOMETHING JUST DESTROYED THE REMOTE POD I LEFT PLUGGED INTO THE F/O TRUNKING. MY LINK TO THE SATELLITE IS ABRUPTLY CUT.

IT MEANS THERE'S SOMEONE ELSE UP HERE.

SOMEONE KANG SENT TO GUARD IT

JIM! BEHIND US..!

TURN!

TURN AND FACE ME!

I MUST SEE YOUR *EYES* AS I TAKE YOUR LIVES!

THAT SUIT! IT'S A WARWEAR, TOO!

I *NEED* TO SEE THE LIFE FLICKER AND DEPART. I *WANT* TO SEE THE EYES GLAZE COLD AND SIGHTLESS.

IT IS MY ONLY *PLEASURE*.

WELL THEN, BABY... YOU GOTTA GET OUT MORE!

SKYE! MOVE! HE'S GONNA-

-UGHNN

MY NAME IS *DIRGE*, "*BABY*". REMEMBER IT.

TOO HARD! FORGET THE ZERO GRAVITY!

I'M SPINNING CLEAR, MOMENTUM CARRYING ME ACROSS THE CHAMBER.

YOU ARE ALSO CLAD IN WARWEAR, I SEE. BUT CLEARLY YOU HAVE NOT BEEN SYNCHED TO IT LONG.

ONLY A *NOVICE* COULD HAVE BEEN CAUGHT SO EASILY.

WHO SAYS I'M CAUGHT?

I CAN RIP THROUGH YOUR ENERGY BUBBLE JUST LIKE-

LIKE I SAID... A NOVICE.

YOU ARE UNSKILLED IN THE WAYS OF WAR. YOU HAVE OBVIOUSLY NEVER BEEN TRAINED IN FREE-FALL COMBAT OR THE MOBILE DEPLOY-MENT OF THE WARWEAR.

DEATH WOULD BE A *KINDNESS* TO A CHARLATAN LIKE YOU...

... AND I AM NOTH-ING IF NOT *KIND*.

EARGHH!

JIM! MOVE!

YOU'RE CLEAR!

YOU WOUNDED ME, ENEMY WITCH!

FOR THAT, I WILL SEND YOU SCREAMING BACK TO THE PIT WHERE YOUR UNHOLY MASTER FORGED YOU!

OH-*

SKYE!

GUUH!

MURDEROUS RED

WHAT A *STRANGE* WAY TO FIGHT... WITH *FISTS.*

THE WARWEAR IS A *LIVING INSTRUMENT* OF DESTRUCTION. IT CAN BREED AND CREATE ANY KILLING TOOL REQUIRED. WHY RELY ON *CLUMSY METHODS?*

I STICK TO WHAT I CAN TRUST.

ME.

THEN IT IS A WONDER YOU HAVE LIVED THIS LONG.

NO! ANOTHER TRICK! THIS GUY HAS OBVIOUSLY HAD A LONG TIME TO MASTER HIS WARWEAR.

*A **SWARM** OF DRONE-REMOTES... SMALLER AND FASTER THAN ANYTHING I'VE PRODUCED...*

RIPPING INTO ME! ALL AROUND! CAN'T SEE!

I'M NOT GOING TO LIVE THROUGH THIS UNLESS I CAN MATCH DIRGE SKILL FOR SKILL!

AND THAT MEANS OPENING UP MY MIND TO THE WARWEAR MORE THAN EVER BEFORE. SINCE I BONDED WITH IT, I'VE RELISHED THE POWER, BUT I'VE NEVER RELAXED INTO ITS POSSIBILITIES.

BUT FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN OF DIRGE, THE WARWEAR IS SIMPLY A NATURAL EXTENSION OF THE WEARER'S FIGHTING SKILLS, A WAY OF MAKING IMAGINATION FLESH.

SO I LET GO... AND THE FEELING IS LIBERATING.

I BURN THE SWARM OFF ME...

AHKK!

AGGK!

... AND THEN TAKE IT TO DIRGE. I CAN FEEL THE WARWEAR SINGING AS IT MORPHS AROUND ME.

SO... YOU'RE LEARN-ING!

WE'LL JUST SEE ABOUT THAT.

UGHHN!

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE! I HAVE SERVED THE CON-QUEROR FOR *DECADES*. NO *PUPPY* LIKE YOU IS GOING TO BEST ME.

I'VE GOT HIM IN A LOCK, BUT HE'S AS STRONG AS A BULL...

... AND AS WE WRESTLE, OUR SUITS BOND TOGETHER. THEY GRAPPLE, GROW, TRYING TO INVADE AND OVERPOWER EACH OTHER.

AND AS A RESULT...

... OUR MINDS LINK.

I SEE THROUGH DIRGE'S EYES. I SEE THE LONG AND BLOODY LIFE HE'S LED AS A PARTNER OF THE WARWEAR, FIGHTING ACROSS TIME AND SPACE AS A MERCENARY OF KANG.

THEN I SEE BEYOND THAT, INTO THE PAST OF HIS WARWEAR ITSELF...

... FAR AWAY AND LONG AGO, UNDER UNFAMILIAR STARS, WHEN IT WAS PART OF THE EIDOLON HOST, WAGING WAR AGAINST THE ENEMIES OF THEIR RACE.

THE MEMORY IS SO OLD, IT'S BECOME COLD AND FRAIL. BUT IT IS CLEAR.

IN AGES PAST, THE EIDOLON, CLAD IN THEIR INTELLIGENT BODYSHEATHS, WERE THE GREATEST, MOST FEARED WARRIORS IN CREATION.

THAT IS THE LEGACY I WEAR.

THE LEGACY OF A WARRIOR RACE LONG DEAD.

I SNAP OUT OF THE MEMORY-DREAM AND FIND DIRGE DRIFTING LIMPLY IN THE AIR.

LOCKED IN BATTLE, THE WARWEAR KILLED HIM FROM THE **INSIDE**.

IT REJOICES AROUND ME, PROUD OF ITS VICTORY, SINGING ITS BATTLE HYMN.

BUT I CAN'T SHARE IN ITS GLEE. MY VIEW OF LIFE AND DEATH IS STILL A HUMAN ONE.

DIRGE'S WARWEAR BEGINS TO SELF-DESTRUCT. TIME TO WITHDRAW.

SKYE?

TOO LATE FOR ME, JIM...

I CAN GET YOU FREE.

THE THREAT HERE IS OVER. DIRGE'S SELF-DESTRUCTION WILL TAKE THE SATELLITE WITH IT.

HELP ME OVER TO THE MAIN CONSOLE...

... THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO SHOW YOU.

I'VE ALIGNED THE RADIO TELE-SCOPE. WHAT YOU'RE SEEING IS A STARMAP AND A SEQUENCE OF GALACTIC CO-ORDINATES.

REMEMBER THEM. THAT IS WHERE THE EIDOLON COME FROM. THAT IS WHERE YOU'LL FIND YOUR DESTINY.

OUT *THERE*? MAYBE THAT'S A DESTINY I ***DON'T*** WANT.

TO UNDERSTAND THE WARWEAR, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND ITS MAKERS.

ONE DAY, MAYBE. BUT NOW, I'VE GOT THINGS TO DEAL WITH ON *MY* ***OWN*** PLANET. BEFORE I THINK ABOUT THE BIG ***OUT THERE***.

DON'T LEAVE IT TOO LONG. NOW THAT YOU'RE BONDED TO THE WARWEAR, ONLY *DEATH* CAN FREE YOU...

... AS IT NOW FREES ME. THE DAYS ARE NUMBERED, JIM RHODES... MY MASTER IS COMING...*

GONE.

SHE WAS NEVER ANYTHING BUT A MYSTERY TO ME, AND NOW SHE'S GONE-- LEAVING STILL GREATER QUESTIONS IN HER PASSING.

MY PLANET'S SAFE. THE SATELLITE IS ABOUT TO GO.

I SHOULD FEEL HAPPIER THAN THIS.

STARK

DIRGE'S WARWEAR GLOWS, CONVULSES AND COLLAPSES. ENERGY HAMMERS OUT LIKE A TIDAL WAVE.

STARK'S GREAT THREAT EXPIRES SILENTLY, UNMOURNED.

AND I RIDE THE WAVE HOMEWARD, TO START PICKING UP THE PIECES...

S.H.I.E.L.D. RESEARCH INFIRMARY, BAKERSFIELD, CA.

SHEVA?

I'M SORRY, I'VE BEEN UNABLE TO REACH RHODEY ANYWHERE. HE'S NOT ANSWERING AT HOME, AND WORLDWATCH DOESN'T SEEM TO KNOW WHERE HE IS.

WE'LL KEEP TRYING.

I GOT THROUGH TO RAE LACOSTE, THOUGH. SHE'S ON HER WAY.

SHEVA... WE'RE DOING *EVERYTHING* WE CAN.

I KNOW, AGENT MARTELL, I KNOW.

BUT THERE'S ONE EXTRA THING YOU COULD DO.

NEW STAR IN HEAVEN TONIGHT...

... MAKE A WISH.

Be here next month for a tale of love, luck, life ... and death.

TIME WILL TELL